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R 210839Z MAY 08  
FM AMEMBASSY TASHKENT  
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 9681  
INFO RUEHZG/NATO EU COLLECTIVE  
RUEHAB/AMEMBASSY ASHGABAT 3971  
RUEHTA/AMEMBASSY ASTANA 0184  
RUEHEK/AMEMBASSY BISHKEK 4586  
RUEHLM/AMEMBASSY COLOMBO 0465  
RUEHKA/AMEMBASSY DHAKA 0389  
RUEHDBU/AMEMBASSY DUSHANBE 0468  
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C O N F I D E N T I A L TASHKENT 000578

SIPDIS

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 05/21/2018

TAGS: PGOV PREL PHUM KCRM KWMN SOCI UZ

SUBJECT: IOM QUIETLY MAKING NEW EFFORT TO REGISTER IN  
UZBEKISTAN

REF: TASHKENT

Classified By: Political Officer Tim Buckley for reasons 1.4 (B,D)

¶1. (C) Summary: International Organization for Migration (IOM) Chief of Mission in Kazakhstan Mahmoud Naderi met with poloff on the margins of a major international workshop on trafficking in persons (TIP) in Tashkent on May 14-15. Naderi confirmed that IOM executives in Geneva have discreetly approached the Uzbek delegation to discuss the possibility of obtaining formal registration in Uzbekistan. IOM has been able to implement projects and maintain local staff, but "it would be much easier" with registration. IOM is hoping a senior delegation can visit Uzbekistan in the near future, and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) Head of the UN and International Political Organizations Department Farkhad Khamraev told poloff and visiting Congressional staffer on May 16 that "there are some outstanding issues" but nonetheless "cooperation would be useful for both sides." Naderi believes the stumbling block is the organization's previous assistance to refugees in Andijon, although IOM's registration difficulties predate these 2005 events. Registration of IOM would be a positive step forward on human rights and clarify the confusing anti-TIP picture. As with the recent resumption of prison visits by the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), we may be able to serve as an honest broker behind the scenes and convince the Government of Uzbekistan that registering IOM would be a low-risk, mutually beneficial decision. End summary.

"The Missing Link"

¶2. (C) Naderi traveled to Tashkent on May 14-15 to participate in a major international TIP workshop jointly sponsored by the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) and the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC). The event was significant in that it was a

platform for the Government of Uzbekistan to trumpet its recently passed anti-TIP legislation (septel), which was the centerpiece of a productive watershed year in anti-TIP efforts in Uzbekistan. However, IOM remains unregistered in Uzbekistan since its last unsuccessful attempt in 2004, and Naderi described IOM as "the missing link" in the spectrum of anti-TIP efforts in the country.

¶ 13. (C) While IOM is not officially registered in Uzbekistan it has been able to implement anti-TIP projects in the country. It is affiliated with a local anti-TIP NGO "Istiqbolli Avlod" (Future Generation), which is highly regarded for its work administering two shelters, assisting in the repatriation and rehabilitation of victims, and training law enforcement personnel. USAID provides funding support for IOM's activities through Istiqbolli Avlod, and the Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs (INL) is funding the NGO's ongoing law enforcement training project. IOM does maintain a small office in Uzbekistan with local staff, but Naderi said that it is "becoming contractually difficult to maintain." He added that although the organization has been able to get things done in Uzbekistan "it would be much easier" if it were registered. He also noted IOM is frustrated about not getting credit for the work carried out by Istiqbolli Avlod on IOM's behalf.

Overtures in Geneva

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¶ 14. (C) Naderi was guarded early in the conversation but opened up once poloff mentioned the possibility that the Embassy could delicately raise the issue with the Government of Uzbekistan. He confided that IOM executives recently approached the Uzbek delegation in Geneva to discuss the possibility of formal registration. IOM hopes that a group of senior executives will be able to visit Tashkent in the near future for additional discussions.

The View from MFA

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¶ 15. (C) Poloff and a visiting Congressional staffer from the U.S. Helsinki Commission subsequently met with MFA Chief of the UN Department Khamraev on May 16 to discuss counter-TIP efforts, and Khamraev surprisingly raised IOM's status in the meeting. He noted that there are still some outstanding issues with IOM but that "cooperation would be useful for both sides." Khamraev credited IOM with successful ongoing cooperation to repatriate Uzbek trafficking victims, adding that "none of our requests have gone unanswered." Furthermore, he said IOM will be involved in a labor migration event at the end of June, and "after that we can see about the status." Yet he restated that IOM's status would not change "in the nearest future."

Confronting Ghosts of the Past

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¶ 16. (C) Naderi said that he believes the main stumbling block with the Government of Uzbekistan is that IOM demonstrated a ready willingness to assist Uzbek refugees in the aftermath of the Andijon tragedy in 2005, including resettlement assistance. However, the previous unsuccessful attempt to register predated these events. He said IOM will continue to fulfill its mission as an international organization regardless of such consequences with individual host governments, and he noted that UNHCR is likewise no longer welcome in Uzbekistan. However, Naderi also understands that the time may be right for a fresh outreach.

Comment:

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¶ 17. (C) While Uzbekistan may still hold a grudge about IOM's assistance to Uzbek refugees in 2005, we believe it may be possible to convince the Uzbeks that registering IOM sooner

rather than later would be in its best interests. Times are different. Uzbekistan no longer denies human trafficking is a problem and it is poised to make substantial progress if it effectively implements its new law, and IOM's presence could only help its efforts and image on the TIP front. The Government of Uzbekistan is once again talking with the West - even on a limited basis about Andijon - so a punitive stance toward IOM makes little sense. Khamraev's comments suggest Uzbekistan has already committed itself to a "step by step" expansion of activities with IOM, and so progressing to the next step of formal registration may be possible.

**¶8. (C)** The Embassy played a key role behind the scenes earlier this year in facilitating an agreement between the ICRC and the Government of Uzbekistan to resume prison visits. We satisfied the international organization's concerns about neutrality and demonstrated to the Uzbeks that we will publicly credit tangible steps forward. We may be able to serve as the honest broker in this situation as well. Formal registration for IOM would be a positive development in countering the serious TIP situation and offer Uzbekistan another step toward the mainstream.

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